

## **Home Delivered Meals: More than a Nutrition Solution**

Good morning! It is a pleasure and an honor to be here and I am thrilled we are having a nutrition-focused solutions forum for the WHCOA. I would like to recognize Bob Blancato for all his efforts in advocating on behalf of our nutrition programs. He is our advocacy consultant for NANASP and he does a spectacular job of knowing who we should go to and when specific issues affecting our programs are at a critical need for advocacy. I would also like to thank Jean for coming back home to Ohio and keeping us in her thoughts as she represents nutrition for older adults through the Older Americans Act. We are so proud of all that Jean does for us at the Administration on Aging. Finally, I am delighted to recognize Roger Szemraj, whom you will meet in a short while. Roger came here from Washington DC, and he knows more about nutrition programs than any nutritionist I have ever met (including myself)! Every time I talk to Roger, I learn more and more, and I am convinced there is so much more we can do with our programs. Roger was very instrumental in bringing the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to Ohio, and he continues to work toward making the program successful in communities across the country.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like us to do some visualization; this will help us get in the frame of mind needed to find solutions to some of the challenges facing our programs today.

Let's all close our eyes. Relax. Take a deep breath. Imagine you have been ill and in the hospital. You just came home yesterday. This

morning someone came to help you take a bath and dress. Now you are waiting for someone to bring you a meal. Think about what you might be doing while you are waiting. It seems to take longer than you expected and you are getting rather hungry because you didn't have a chance to have breakfast, nor did you have the energy to prepare anything. Come to think of it, you're not sure if there is any food in the house for you to eat. Finally, you hear the doorbell ring. It is very difficult for you to get up to answer the door. You finally get there and you open the door. Imagine what the person at the other end does when you open the door. Does s/he come in and help you set up your meal? Does s/he hand you the meal and leave? S/he probably asks how you're feeling, tells you they've missed you and are glad to see you. If you do require assistance with meal set up, s/he may come in and provide it for you. Now you sit down and eat the food. It is nice and hot and it is very comforting to you. It is something you really enjoy eating....

We can now open our eyes.

I was asked here, today, to provide solutions to our home delivered meals programs. One of the prevalent quote solutions to some of the issues with our home delivered meals program that is surfacing more and more is frozen meals. A once per week delivery of five well-balanced "TV dinners" cuts delivery costs (particularly in this time of very high gasoline prices) and still provides five meals per week for home-bound seniors, who have no other access to food. However, would frozen meals have helped us with the situation we just envisioned?

I don't think so. A meal is more than nutrients. Meals are meant to be shared one way or another. Even if it is in the form of a brief, friendly hello and inquiry into how we're feeling, it will leave us with a smile and make our food more palatable.

I recently had the opportunity to hear Scott Nystrom, Executive Director of the White House Conference on Aging speak, and he described our network as miracle workers. He bragged that we do more with less than any other group he knows about. For a bureaucrat who has other items on his agenda, that may be a complement. For us in the trenches, I feel it is unconscionable for our frailest, most-vulnerable senior citizens to be forced to receive the bare minimum.

The aging network will not be able to continue to do more with less. There will come a time when we reach a breaking point and it just is no longer possible to expand our services without adequate compensation. Or, we may compromise our services in order to be cost-effective and our services will no longer be effective. The diluted version of services we are forced to provide will not meet the need. That time is rapidly approaching.

One of the greatest solutions I have found in our programs is local control. In this day and age of corporate America, it seems logical that we can serve more meals by using larger companies. Economies of scale greatly influence our purchasing power and may enable reduced costs of

raw material. However, in this case, our seniors can receive a much greater quality of life, when they know their community is helping them. There is a greater bond and sense of responsibility between community and seniors. For example, one of our community programs periodically uses recipes from a local restaurant. Seniors recognize the food and it brings back happy memories.

Hot shot trucks are another wonderful solution to some of our home delivered meal challenges. These are trucks with heated compartments that maintain our meals at temperatures that prevent bacterial growth and preserve palatability and food quality. This in turn increases efficiency and scope. We are able to safely deliver more meals with fewer drivers to a larger reach of clients.

Volunteer meal deliverers are invaluable, but we also need to recognize the necessity for paid deliverers when volunteers aren't available.

Besides nutrition, a hot, daily meal provides a daily check and a friendly face, if even for a moment. Delivering frozen meals for rethermalization provides only one small component of all the needed solutions. An example of such a situation is for evening use, and if the recipient has multiple out-patient medical appointments such as chemotherapy.

In response to Jean's findings regarding the prevalence of home delivered meals relative to congregate meals being served in Ohio, I would like to offer the following solutions: Increased level of nutrition assessment

provided by a licensed, professional dietitian to ensure the individual is home bound and in need of a home delivered meal. In addition; let's improve our congregate meal sites. Many of the sites were built for the nutrition program when it began. We are now celebrating 30 years! Our buildings need to be inviting. As we age, it is not easy for us to get out of our homes to come to a site for a meal, fellowship, and an activity. Our programs need to be a draw and encourage people to make the effort, and then feel comfortable and at ease when they arrive. They will in turn want to return to the site.

One final solution to our home delivered meal program I would like to offer is the option of three meals and two snacks per day, seven days per week. One meal per day is great for those who are able to fix something for breakfast, and have a caregiver prepare snacks, and meals for evenings and weekends. However, for those completely dependent on community services for their nutritional needs, providing 100% of the DRI's will greatly enhance nutritional status, quality of life and health.

In conclusion, let's continue to serve high quality, hot home delivered meals at least five days per week. Let's use community resources, hot shot trucks and paid drivers where volunteers are not available. Let's improve our congregate sites to make them inviting, use licensed, professional dietitians to provide nutrition assessment and individual education where warranted, and for those who are assessed to need it, let's provide 100% of the Dietary Recommended Intakes, seven days per week. Thank you again.